

PAINT COLORS

INTRODUCTION

The color of a building is, perhaps, its most dominant visual characteristic. The color of a building can enhance or detract from its own architectural characteristics as well as neighboring structures.

Paint color is easily changed to reflect personal preferences and current architectural taste. The color palette used in Alexandria has changed significantly since the 18th century. Technological and economic constraints in the 18th and early-19th centuries limited the available palette of colors. Changes in technology and architectural preferences in the mid-to-late-19th century combined to greatly broaden the color spectrum and by the late-19th century there was a preference for a dark colored palette. Color preferences again changed in the early years of the 20th century and a light colored palette was generally favored. Today, a darker color palette is often used, reflecting, in part, a preference to do away with the "chromomatic monotony of the past half century" as one scholar of historic paint color has put it.

While the Zoning Ordinance permits the Boards to review the exterior paint color of a building, it has been the long standing policy of the Boards of Architectural Review that paint colors for the exterior of a building are only reviewed in conjunction with a construction project. In addition, the Boards reserve the right to review paint colors in instances where the new color is so clearly inappropriate as to constitute alteration of the architectural character of the building.

As part of the Guidelines review process, the Boards have developed a *Color Chart of Historically Accurate Paint Colors in the Old and Historic Alexandria District and the Parker-Gray District* which can be consulted to help determine appropriate colors that reflect the historic heritage of the City. The Boards strongly urge building owners in the historic districts who paint their buildings to make use of this information. The informa-

tion identifies historically accurate paint colors for the body, trim, door and roof colors of historic buildings for the different periods of architecture found in the historic districts. The historic research was prepared by the Staff of the Boards of Architectural Review and includes an analysis of historic exterior paint colors from the 18th to the 20th centuries in the districts.

The Boards actively discourage painting a building or its trim a clearly inappropriate color. For example, the color purple is considered to be an inappropriate color. There are a wide range of colors that have been used in the historic districts over the last 45 years and that are now considered traditional, although they may not accurately reflect historic paint colors.

The Zoning Ordinance stipulates that, in all cases, painting a previously unpainted masonry surface, no matter what color, requires review and approval of a certificate of appropriateness by the Boards. Additionally the Boards strongly discourage the painting of a previously unpainted masonry surface.

REQUIREMENTS

- Painting of previously unpainted masonry surfaces require approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness. (§ 10-109(B)(4) and § 10-209(B)(4) of the Zoning Ordinance)
- Using paint to create artificial architectural elements requires review and approval of a certificate of appropriateness.

GUIDELINES

- Structures should be painted a color appropriate to the historical period of the architectural style.
- Day-glow, neon and metallic colors as well as the color purple are inappropriate in the historic districts and the application of these colors alters the architectural character of the building.

APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

All applications for approval of paint colors must contain the following information:

Alexandria Business License

Proof of a valid Alexandria Business License is required at the time of application for contractors, subcontractors, architects, and designers.

Photograph of Existing Building

Clear photographs of the existing building are required for reference.

Color

The proposed color of the structure must be indicated and an actual color sample provided. The color sample should indicate the type of paint, the paint manufacturer, the name of the paint and the product and color number.

RELATED SECTIONS

Exterior and Storm Doors
Fences, Walls & Gates
Roofing Materials
Shutters
Siding Materials

REFERENCES:

Roger Moss and Gail Caskey Winkler, *Victorian Exterior Decoration, How to Paint Your Nineteenth-Century American House Historically*, (N.Y., N.Y., Henry Holt and Company, 1987)

Roger Moss, *Century of Color, Exterior Decoration for American Buildings - 1820/1920*, (American Life Foundation, 1981).

The following are available from the Staff of the B.A.R.:

Color Chart of Historically Accurate Paint Colors in the Old and Historic Alexandria District and the Parker-Gray District.

Al Cox, AIA, *Appropriate Roofing Materials in the Old and Historic Alexandria District.*

Peter H. Smith, *Historic Exterior Paint Colors in the Alexandria Historic Districts.*

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